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Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on his mission to Fiji*

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Human Rights Council the report of the Special Rapporteur on right to education, Kishore Singh, on his mission to Fiji from 8 to 15 December 2015.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur welcomes important reforms ushered in by the Government, along with national initiatives to overcome ethnic divides and to build a better Fiji for all. He reviews the legal framework of the educational system and progress made in improving access to, the quality of and equity in education, and considers financial support for education.

The report highlights disparities in education and other challenges relating to the provision of quality education. It analyses developments as well as constraints in the ambitious programme to strengthen the technical and vocational education and training sector.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for strengthening national efforts to realize the right to education in Fiji.

* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent developments.

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** Circulated in the language of submission only.

I. Introduction

1. The Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kishore Singh, carried out an official visit to the Republic of Fiji from 8 to 15 December 2015, at the invitation of the Government.

2. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur met with Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney General and Minister for Finance; Mahendra Reddy, Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts; Jioji Konusi Konrote, Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations; Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources; and Naipote Katonitabua, Acting Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister. He was received by the Parliamentary Commission for Social Affairs and met with representatives of the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, the Chief Justice of Fiji, the Chief Registrar of the High Court of Fiji and members of the diplomatic community.

3. The Special Rapporteur had the opportunity to visit the University of the South Pacific. He visited technical institutions, as well as community and government schools, and met their management team, teachers and students in Suva, Lautoka and Sabeto. He met with several representatives from the international community and civil society, including representatives from the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the International Labour Organization and numerous civil society organizations.

4. The Special Rapporteur expresses his gratitude to the Government of Fiji for its invitation and the full cooperation throughout his mission. He also extends his thanks to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Fiji and Geneva, and all those who took time to meet with him and share their experiences in the field of education.

II. General overview

5. The Republic of Fiji is comprised of 332 islands and 522 smaller islets in the South Pacific. Of those, more than 100 islands are permanently inhabited by a population of 880,000. The two largest islands are home to approximately 80 per cent of the country's population. The large island of Viti Levu accounts for over half of the country's land area and is where the capital, Suva, is located. Vanua Levu, which lies 64 km north of Viti Levu, is another large island. The population of Fiji is about 60 per cent iTaukei and 40 per cent of Indian descent. Nearly 99 per cent of iTaukei are Christian, and around 80 per cent of Fiji Islanders of Indian descent are Hindu.

6. Fiji recognizes three official languages: English, *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and Hindi. *Vosa Vaka-Viti* is spoken as either a first or second language by indigenous Fiji islanders. Fiji islanders of Indian descent speak a local variant of Hindi known as Fiji Hindi. English is widely used as a lingua franca in more populated areas.

7. Fiji is going through a historic period of transition, and has launched a national initiative to overcome ethnic divides and build a better Fiji for all, under the slogan "One nation, one Fiji". The Peoples' Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, adopted on 15 December 2008, is a landmark document which seeks to transform Fiji from a fragmented society into a culturally vibrant and united democratic nation that seeks peace and prosperity. The Charter expresses a shared vision and principles for building a better Fiji for all and for celebrating diversity. It reflects the concept of a common good, with respect for diverse cultural, religious and philosophical beliefs, and a people driven by a common national identity. The Government's commitment to promoting a multicultural

nation that respects all ethnicities and communities is intended to put an end to racial divisions through common shared values.

8. Under the new Constitution of Fiji, adopted in 2013, all citizens of Fiji are known as Fijians and have equal status and identity, which means that they are equally entitled to all rights, privileges, duties, benefits and responsibilities of citizenship.

9. Fiji celebrated a democratic election in 2014, which was aimed at developing a common national identity and promised to usher in an era of stability and progress.

III. Legal framework for the right to education

A. International obligations of Fiji

10. Fiji is State party to only a few international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child[1] and its optional protocols, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It is a signatory but not yet a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[2] Fiji has not yet signed or ratified other important international human rights conventions on the right to education, including the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights and the Convention against Discrimination in Education.

11. The Government has taken measures to better integrate its international human rights obligations into its domestic legal order and policymaking. In October 2012, the Government established the Fiji Human Rights Treaty Committee, co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General and composed of representatives of the Government and civil society. The Committee has as its primary task the development of a national human rights action plan, which will incorporate the country's obligations under international human rights treaties to which it is a State party into national law and policy. The Special Rapporteur is supportive of these efforts to mainstream human rights into government ministries and policymaking. In addition to strengthening the application of the right to education in national policies and institutions, this will also reinforce human rights for women, children and people in vulnerable situations.

12. Along with the international community, Fiji has also made political commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/1. Goal 4, Target 4.1, of the Agenda stipulates that by 2030 Member States will "ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes". Moreover, following the adoption in May 2015 of the Incheon Declaration: Education 2030—Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, and the adoption in November 2015 of the Education 2030 Framework for Action on the occasion of the UNESCO General Conference, Fiji, along with countries all over the world, reaffirmed political commitments to attaining the goal of universal quality education for all free of cost. Building an inclusive education system is a main thrust of the future development agenda.

[1] Ratified on 13 August 1993.

[2] Signed on 2 June 2010.

B. Right to education and the national legal system

13. The 2013 Constitution of Fiji, in its article 31, enshrines the right to education, specifying that every person has the right to: (a) early childhood education; (b) primary and secondary education; and (c) further education. The same article also provides that "the State must take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right (a) to free early childhood, primary, secondary and further education; and (b) to education for persons who were unable to complete their primary and secondary education". Article 26 affirms the right to equality and freedom from discrimination and provides that "every person has the right of access, membership or admission, without discrimination on a prohibited ground, to … education institutions".

14. The Constitution further provides that the teaching of conversational and contemporary *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and Fiji Hindi is to be compulsory in all primary schools (art. 31 (3)). It also reflects the State's human rights obligation with regard to financing education as a public function. Article 31 (5) states that "in applying any right under this section, if the State claims that it does not have the resources to implement the right, it is the responsibility of the State to show that the resources are not available".

15. Thus, the Constitution, as the supreme law of the land, contains several provisions of key importance concerning the right to education. These provisions are, however, not adequately incorporated into current education laws. The Education Act 1978, currently in force, does not adequately reflect the responsibilities of the State and the international legal obligations as laid down in international human rights conventions. The Act also lags behind the plans made in the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan for the period 2015-2018. Many of its provisions have been overruled either in practice or by administrative instructions. The Government is in the process of drafting legislation to replace the Education Act, but such legislation had not been enacted at the time of the present report.

16. Fiji has several other laws in the field of education, including the Examination Act, the University of the South Pacific Act, the Higher Education Promulgation of 2008, the Fiji Teachers Registration Promulgation of 2008, the 2009 Fiji National University Decree and the 2011 University of Fiji Decree.

IV. Education system in Fiji

17. Public education in Fiji is open to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or background. It is also integrated and inclusive, accepting students of all religions and backgrounds, and designed to accommodate children with disabilities. Finally, it is coeducational, with boys and girls studying together in schools.

18. The educational system of Fiji is divided into four sections: early childhood education, and primary, secondary and tertiary education.[3]

[3] Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts of the Government of Fiji, "Education for all: mid-decade assessment report" (UNESCO, 2008). Available from datatopics.worldbank.org/hnp/files/edstats/FJIefapr07.pdf.

A. Early childhood education, and primary and secondary education

19. Early childhood education is being progressively introduced throughout Fiji. Existing primary schools enrol 5-year-old students in kindergarten, while some faith-based or community-run schools enrol children as young as 3 years of age, while private day care is available in some areas for children aged 2-5. The Government reports that there are 1,066 registered kindergartens in the country, with 1,030 registered early childhood education teachers, 11 of whom are male. Of the total, 889 had received teacher training in early childhood care and education, while the rest had received some form of basic training in early childhood education. As of April 2016, there were 11,836 children enrolled in 526 kindergartens.

20. The early childhood education curriculum prioritizes teaching interpersonal skills, developing cultural and spiritual awareness, demonstrating caring and respect for others, and teaching inclusiveness. It includes play-based indoor and outdoor learning. The ongoing development of early learning development standards will be an important measure of how children are learning and progressing. The involvement of other ministries, including those responsible for health, social welfare and communities, offers an opportunity to improve the overall welfare of children.

21. The current policies provide that primary and secondary education is compulsory. The first eight years of formal education is within a primary school model, covering years 1 to 8. The following four years (years 9-12) are within secondary school and, in principle, compulsory. At year 10, students are given the option to continue their formal education or join a technical college for specific skills training for certificate II qualification.

22. In 2014, there were 138,672 primary school students and 68,063 secondary school students.[4] The student-teacher ratio for primary schools was 24:1, while for secondary schools it was 14:1.[5] Net enrolment in primary school was 99.43 per cent in 2014, though it declined to 81.7 per cent for secondary school.[6] This may be in part due to some students attending vocational secondary programmes, along with some having dropped out or sought employment directly. In 2015, there were 731 primary schools and 176 secondary schools in Fiji. This includes 75 secondary schools with vocational programmes, 17 schools for children with special needs and 3 technical college campuses.

23. A special feature of the educational system in Fiji is the predominance of community schools over government schools. Out of all the schools in Fiji, including early childhood education centres, only 14 are run by the Government; the rest are managed by the community in which the school is located.

24. Community schools in Fiji often display a connection between the wealth of the community and the resources of the school.[7] Disparities in wealth among communities perpetuate differences in the quality of education, although government programmes aimed at poor children are improving the situation. A zoning policy has also been applied to ensure that students are selected geographically and enrolled in schools close to their homes.

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[4] www.education.gov.fj/index.php/g/moe-statistics/student-enrolment.

[5] www.education.gov.fj/index.php/g/moe-statistics/student-teacher-ratio.

[6] Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, 2015-2018 Education Sector Strategic Development Plan, p. 17. Available from http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Fiji/Fiji-2015-2018_ESSDP_Education_Sector_Strategic_Devt-Plan.pdf.

[7] *Education in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, Michael Crossley and others, eds. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 250.

25. The Special Rapporteur notes that the nature of the partnership between the Government of Fiji and the school management committees (private or religious organizations) has changed over the past decade. He acknowledges that the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts has standardized school management procedures, and has control over curriculum development and the appointment of staff, including school heads and principals. Further, the majority of funds for teachers' salaries, student school fees and capital development are provided by the Ministry.

26. Some 98 per cent of schools are owned by the communities in which they are located, or by faith-based organizations. While private schools are not under government control and follow international curricula, community schools follow the same curricula as government schools and receive the same level of government funding.

27. It may be noted that, with regard to religion, conscience and belief, article 22 (4) of the Constitution of Fiji of 2013 provides that "every religious community or denomination, and every cultural or social community, has the right to establish, maintain and manage places of education … provided that the educational institutions maintain any standard prescribed by law". In addition, in exercising its rights under article 22 (4), "a religious community or denomination has the right to provide religious instruction as part of any education that it provides".

B. Technical and vocational education

28. The national technical and vocational education and training system is undergoing transformation. From 2012 to 2014, pursuant to an important policy measure, vocational courses were being mainstreamed into secondary schools in an effort to promote vocational training to meet skills requirements. As a government initiative, a memorandum of understanding established technical colleges in various education districts, beginning in 2015, to provide an alternate pathway to formal education and skills training for young people and school leavers.

29. There are 72 secondary schools that offer two-year vocational programmes that prepare students for the employment market. Courses cover such topics as automotive engineering, carpentry, catering, tailoring, welding, fabrication, office technology, computer studies, marine studies, woodcraft, sports and vocational agriculture. In 2014, there were approximately 3,459 students taking part, one third of whom were female. Most male students were studying automotive engineering, welding or carpentry, while the majority of female students were in catering and tailoring.

C. Tertiary education

30. The Government recognizes the critical importance of tertiary institutions for developing high-quality human resources, especially in an increasingly technology-driven world economy. It is grappling with the challenges facing tertiary-level institutions, including those relating to the strengthening of curricula, the improvement of funding and facilities, and staffing (especially among lecturers).

31. At the institutes of higher education, students can obtain degrees in the sciences, arts and humanities and social sciences. The Fiji National University is the largest university in Fiji, with the highest enrolment in tertiary-level education. In January 2010, six separate institutions were merged into the Fiji National University.

32. The University of the South Pacific, with its main campus in Suva, is a premier university in the Pacific region. It is an example of intergovernmental partnerships in education, with collaboration among 12 Pacific island States. Approximately 2,500 full-time students are enrolled in on-campus study, and an additional 5,000 study in off-campus/extension modules, based in various centres in neighbouring countries. The university conducts collaborative research through a research network. Such work includes research aimed at gaining a better understanding of human rights, as well as common ethics.

33. Fiji benefits from regional collaboration in the field of tertiary education. Australia makes a substantial contribution to tertiary and further technical education in Fiji. The University of Southern Queensland also operates two campuses in Fiji. In addition, Fiji benefits from cooperation with France and New Zealand in the field of education.

34. Fiji has strengthened its oversight of tertiary education through the establishment of the Fiji Higher Education Commission and a qualifications framework for technical education,[8] and is in the process of establishing a national research council.

V. Education reforms

35. Fiji has undertaken comprehensive reform of its education system. Reform-driven strategies address a number of areas. These include: (a) implementation of a curriculum framework to enhance spiritual, intellectual, social and physical development and strengthen instruction in *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and Hindi, as well as English; (b) improvement in the number and abilities of competent and motivated teachers, reduction of pupil-teacher ratios and increased use of standard improvement measurement in schools; (c) enhancement of the rural education programme by establishing appropriate infrastructure, improving standards, reviewing school performance and piloting a distance education programme; (d) strengthened partnership between government, communities, development partners, municipal councils, school management committees, developers and parents; (e) expanded technical and vocational educational and training for skills development; and (f) effective and efficient allocation of subsidies to tertiary institutions.

A. Key pillars of reform

36. The Special Rapporteur was informed about the three key pillars underpinning education reform: (a) strengthening staffing and the quality of delivery, with a focus on professional development, improvement of the methodology of teaching and learning, and recruitment of a large number of teachers to reduce the student-teacher ratio; (b) reviewing the curriculum, enhancing quality, developing specific methodologies for science and mathematics and reintroducing an examination system to evaluate the performance of students; and (c) improving the quality of infrastructure, especially in remote areas, and the quality of classroom delivery, including through rural service allowance schemes for teachers as an incentive to serve in remote and maritime areas.[9]

[8] For more details, see www.fhec.org.fj.

[9] Presentation to the Special Rapporteur by the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts on 14 December 2015.

B. Policy texts underlying the reform process

37. As part of the reform process, Fiji has developed a range of policy texts, including on the following topics: early childhood education (2013); enterprise education; examinations and assessments (2012); grants distribution; effective implementation of inclusive education; establishment, recognition and registration of schools; national curriculum assessment and reporting; school zoning (reviewed in 2014); rural allowances; monitoring of school standards and inspection (reviewed in 2014); and special education (2013). In order to enhance their effectiveness, many of these policy texts could be converted into rules and regulations, with a coherent and holistic approach. This would also strengthen the national framework on the right to education. In the national curriculum assessment and reporting policy, which provides general guidance to schools regarding the assessment of students, general prescriptions such as the requirement for "equitable and relevant assessments" for student progress reports require further refining.

VI. Entitlement to education and universalized access

38. The right to education as an entitlement to access to education is inextricably linked with the right to education as empowerment in terms of knowledge, values, skills and competencies.

A. Accessibility: provision of education free of cost

39. Primary and secondary education in Fiji is tuition-free, and students are now given free textbooks. School-based vocational centres are also tuition-free. The "Topper's Scheme" scholarship programme provides free tuition for the top 600 secondary school graduates. The Tertiary Education Loans Scheme provides loans to all students who are accepted into a university or technical college, though these remain repayable in full at the rate of 20 per cent of the student's gross salary upon employment.[10]

40. The Special Rapporteur would like to recall that Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed the Government's fee-free programme, which was designed to eliminate the cost of primary and secondary education, though it remained concerned that indirect costs, including uniforms, exercise books and transport costs, were causing children to drop out of schools, as their families could not afford those costs.

41. Nearly all students in their final year of primary education move on to the first year of secondary education, a commendable transition rate. However, the percentage of students completing primary education is diminishing due to the cost of fees and transport.[11] It may be recalled that Fiji accepted the recommendations made by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in its 2010 review of Fiji (A/HRC/14/8) to ensure the full enjoyment by all children of the rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly with regard to access to education and health services.

42. The dropout rate, which is very low in primary school, is much higher in secondary school. The dropout rate for girls in secondary school is lower than that for boys.

43. In this respect, the Special Rapporteur would like to underline the importance of the "Matua" programme, which is aimed at providing continuing education for those who drop

[10] http://home.tslb.com.fj.

[11] International Council for Open and Distance Education. For more information, see www.icde.org.

out of school to address the issue of unemployment. The Special Rapporteur considers it important to relate literacy to skills development.

44. The Government is making an effort to provide one laptop or tablet per child as part of its commitment to digital literacy. It recognizes the importance of distant teaching for small islands, through a policy of providing one learning device for use by primary school students, especially in rural and remote areas. The Government has established information and communications technology telecentres and launched digital literacy programmes in schools in order to bridge the digital divide in rural and remote areas.[12]

45. In order to strengthen digital literacy in schools, the Government partnered in 2014 with the Reach 4 Your Future Foundation, an Australian non-profit organization, to implement a Microsoft-based digital literacy programme for primary students. In 2016, the programme is being expanded to include secondary students. While the Special Rapporteur supports such programmes, he urges the Government to be careful to ensure that such efforts are not captured by commercial or for-profit enterprises, as is the case in many other countries. The repercussions of such programmes on access to education free of cost also require careful consideration.

B. Infrastructure limitations

46. Infrastructure limitations constitute an important factor in regard to access to education. Accessibility is undermined by the geographical isolation of some schools in Fiji. Many primary schools are located on small outlying islands and in remote areas. Students in those places face difficulties in traveling to school daily. Teachers are reluctant to be posted to these schools because of poor living conditions and lack of proper infrastructure and utilities.

47. School infrastructure is a significant challenge for rural and maritime schools in Fiji. Schools on small, remote islands often lack a reliable supply of water or electricity. At the same time, schools in wealthier areas have more resources than those in poorer ones.

48. The location of schools in maritime areas and in the remote areas of the large islands gives rise to accessibility issues. Telecommunications are available in most parts of Fiji, but actual travel is still a challenge for some of the remote rural and maritime schools. This often contributes to a lower quality of education delivery in those areas. The geography of the country and the distribution of schools have resulted in some constraints on access to education. The wide distribution of the population also contributes to this problem.

C. Disparities in access

49. Disparities in access to education between rural/remote and urban areas continue to be a major challenge, as there is still a marked variation in the standard of basic school resources. Rural schools are less economically viable and cannot supplement government grants in order to maintain an acceptable standard of school environment that supports a quality teaching-learning process. Preschool is not yet covered as part of the "fee-free" education plan; however, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is subsidizing tuition for children in early childhood education. Addressing access limitations for children living in poverty should continue to be a priority for the Government.

[12] Statement by the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts to the thirty-eighth session of the UNESCO General Conference, held in Paris in November 2015.

50. Schools for persons with disabilities deserve special consideration with regard to disparities in education. Fiji currently has 17 "special education" schools, which cater exclusively to students with disabilities. These schools, which had 120 teachers and 882 students in 2014, provide specialized education programmes for students with physical and mental learning difficulties. As recognized in article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, such students are receiving an inclusive education within the mainstream education system.

51. The Special Rapporteur visited the Hilton Special School, which is a school for students with disabilities. The capacity to address the needs of all students with disabilities should be strengthened. Greater support for students with disabilities in the 2016 budget should be targeted towards the creation of an inclusive education programme for all regular schools.

52. There remain a significant gender disparity among education professionals. There are more female teachers than male ones in primary and secondary schools. Among professionals in the administrative/managerial category, however, the opposite is true. Around 10 per cent of leadership positions (principals or managers) in primary and secondary schools are held by women.

53. Concerns were also raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding adolescent pregnancy and subsequent school dropout, and the fact that rural schools frequently face with a lack of access to water, electricity or means of communication. In its 2014 concluding observations to Fiji (CRC/C/FJI/CO/2-4), the Committee asked Fiji to elaborate on the progress achieved in implementing the inclusive education policy. The Committee recommended that Fiji allocate sufficient financial support to ensure that all schools were provided with the infrastructure necessary to provide for an effective learning environment.

54. The Special Rapporteur would like to commend the policy measure taken by the Government to rename schools that previously had names with an ethnic connotation. This is an important reform measure to eliminate schools based on ethnicity, and was recognized by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its 2012 concluding observations to Fiji (see CERD/C/FJI/CO/18-20, para. 16).

55. The Special Rapporteur would like to mention educational deprivation on account of poverty, which is the greatest obstacle to realizing the right to education. In accordance with the article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the Convention against Discrimination in Education, public policies need to be devised to provide financial and pedagogic support, along with positive measures, for all those who remain deprived of their right to education in order to mitigate inequities based, inter alia, on social origin and wealth.

56. There seems to be lack of consistency as regards the implementation of *Vosa Vaka-Viti* language instruction. The iTaukei traditions are fading out in schools, and there is fear that the language might be waning. However, concern has been expressed that compulsory *Vosa Vaka-Viti* language instruction is affecting indigenous students' knowledge of English, which is later affecting their attainment levels in tertiary education and future employment opportunities. Disparities between rural and urban students, and between iTaukei and other students, should be addressed with targeted interventions.

VII. Empowerment and quality of education

57. There is a reported disparity in the quality of education in different schools. The gap appears to be related to the economic wealth of communities.

A. Quality concerns in the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan

58. The first Education Sector Strategic Development Plan, developed in 2008 for the period 2009-2011, shows the commitment of Fiji to addressing the quality of education. It affirms the principle of universal access to an expanding, improving and inclusive education, with an innovative curriculum that promotes the development of lifelong skills and good citizenship. It stipulates that all schools should be well resourced, with increased prominence given to technical and vocational education, along with training in education, in order to develop a competent, appropriately qualified, skilled and productive workforce for sustainable development in Fiji.[13]

59. In order to improve the quality of education in Fiji, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts developed a strategic development plan for the period 2015-2018 to address nine priorities in the education sector: (a) improving equitable access to education for all children; (b) strengthening the national curriculum framework to ensure that knowledge, wisdom, skills and cultural, moral and religious values are taught; (c) ensuring that school environments enhance student character, physical development and personal and national identity, and promote social cohesion; (d) ensuring that education professionals are qualified and reflect gender parity; (e) promoting technical education; (f) strengthening partnerships between schools and their communities to improve school management; (g) improving information management; (h) safeguarding the cultural heritage of Fiji; and (i) maintaining a qualifications framework to create skilled workers.

60. The Special Rapporteur noted with great interest that Fiji had developed a national qualifications framework to establish uniform national norms for quality, infrastructure, curriculum content and teacher qualifications. This framework must be refined to further promote civic education, as well as the moral values necessary for making children responsible citizens.

B. A holistic approach to quality

61. The Peoples' Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, adopted on 15 December 2008, recognized the need to promote shared national values through a national education curriculum for multicultural education and to implement a progressive and responsive curriculum. It embodies both moral vision, inspired by the concept of social justice and common good, and the concept of human dignity and equal opportunity. It also recognizes the importance of sharing spiritual and interfaith dialogue, and is aimed at setting morals and standards.

62. The compulsory teaching of conversational and contemporary *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and Fiji Hindi languages in schools is a welcome change, as it promotes respect for cultural diversity and mutual respect for each other. Cultural diversity is inseparable from linguistic diversity, and the teaching of these languages responds to the needs of a multicultural society.

[13] www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/7e20f9ccaca3b6382563658a4ca2773b7a61c48f.pdf.

C. Assessment of student educational attainment

63. The Special Rapporteur would like to underline the importance of the assessment of student educational attainment through a uniform national system, which ensures that minimum standards of educational achievement are respected as students progress through the education system.

64. Ethnic differences are still a concern in terms of performance on examinations. Indigenous Fiji islander students lag behind other ethnic groups on major external examinations. Similar gaps are also evident between students in rural and urban schools. Priority spending in education is a major factor that could contribute to the difference in performance.

65. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the fact that annual testing and monitoring of results has been reinstated. It can be hoped that this will raise the learning achievements of all students and lead to further reforms.

66. In this respect, he commends the concept of education as a common good, which has been embraced by the Government of Fiji. Education should enable the full realization of human rights, as well as human development. It is also a noble cause, and must be safeguarded as a public good. Care must be taken not to envision education as a factory, with inputs and outputs; education is a lifelong learning process. Instead, the policy focus should be on students' educational attainment in whatever setting and at whatever level of education as a lifelong pursuit.

D. Fostering human values as essential objectives of education

67. It is commendable that the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan for the period 2015-2018 underlines the importance of strengthening the Fiji National Curriculum Framework to ensure that knowledge, wisdom, skills and cultural, moral and religious values are taught in order to improve the quality of education in Fiji. The strategy also expresses the need for ensuring that school environments enhance student character, physical development, and personal and national identity, and promote social cohesion.

68. It is important to consider that the Constitution of Fiji allows the State to direct any educational institution to teach subjects pertaining to health, civic education and issues of national interest, and that educational institutions must comply with any such directions made by the State.

69. It may also be noted that Fiji accepted the recommendation of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in its 2010 review that Fiji to integrate a component on human rights education and training into its education system.

70. Full development of the human personality is an essential objective of education, laid down in international human rights conventions. Education can create a better world by enabling children and adults to develop attitudes and behaviour patterns that fill them with a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity and make them respectful of one another's ways and culture. The four pillars of education, propounded by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century in 1996 in its report "Learning: the treasure within", are of perennial importance: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. The Fiji National Curriculum Framework is grounded on these four pillars in its development and implementation.

71. The Special Rapporteur hopes that, in the course of expanding educational opportunities, the empowering role of education of high quality is not neglected and that the provision of quality education receives constant attention, with a focus on the humanistic mission of education.

E. Challenges facing the teaching profession

72. A number of concerns were brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur during his visit. There has been an acute shortage of qualified teachers at the secondary level. The Special Rapporteur is concerned about the state of the teaching profession in Fiji.

73. The personal hardships of living and teaching in remote and maritime schools is a serious obstacle to finding qualified teachers to teach in such schools. Although a rotation system exists to ensure that teachers do not remain in one place, additional consideration needs to be given to incentives and transparency in the operation of this system to ensure that teachers have incentives to serve in rural and remote schools.

74. Teacher remuneration remains a contentious issue in Fiji. Teacher pay was recently reduced for newly recruited teachers during their probationary period. This makes it particularly difficult to attract and retain well-educated teachers, who often seek other government positions when possible. The recent move towards placing all teachers on temporary contracts undermines professionalism, and will deter qualified candidates from pursuing a career in teaching. In order to attract and retain better candidates, teacher working conditions and salaries should be an incentive, not a disincentive. Increases for teachers in rural and maritime areas, however, are welcomed.

75. Teacher qualifications remain an area of concern. Recognizing the lack of educational qualifications among teachers, the Government is promoting professional development incentives. Teacher pay is increased based on educational qualifications, and teachers are provided time off to upgrade their qualifications. Despite this, very few teachers have pursued this option.

VIII. Financing of education

76. Investment in education is an obligation of States under human rights law, and the resources allocated to the education sector on a constant basis evidence the commitment of the Government to the development of education in Fiji.

77. Civil society continues to praise the Government for the sizeable proportion of the budget that is dedicated to education. The contributions have remained steady over the years and have been an integral aspect of Prime Minister Bainimarama's campaign. In 2014, the Government announced a F$ 541.5 million budget for the education sector, almost double what was spent in 2000 and approximately F$ 100 million more than what was spent 2013. Education-related spending was about 4.1 per cent of GDP in 2015.[14] This was projected to rise to 7.5 per cent, consistent with a similar rise since 2014. In 2015, the Government allocated the highest percentage of its budget to education: 16.7 per cent of the total.[15] The budget in 2015 also provided for the introduction of subsidized tuition for 5-year olds at accredited preschools, free tuition at vocational schools, the introduction of a

[14] www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/944500a8-490a-41b3-802c-372783f0fdc1/2016-NATIONAL BUDGET---ESTIMATES.aspx.

[15] Statement by the Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts to the thirty-eighth session of the UNESCO General Conference.

scholarship scheme for the top 600 secondary school graduates, a student loan programme for all other graduates seeking post-secondary education and a free milk programme for year 1 students.

78. A 7.6 per cent increase in the education budget for 2016 is intended to provide for the recruitment of 350 new teachers, to increase teacher salaries in both primary and secondary schools, to increase the remote location allowance for teachers and to allow for the establishment of eight more technical colleges. Education and training continue to be the Government's top priority. Investment in the education sector has been unwavering, with the largest share of the annual budget of Fiji devoted to this area.

79. The unprecedented increase in financial resources devoted by the Government to education must be commended, as it demonstrates a deep commitment to the future of this country. The Special Rapporteur was informed that 80 per cent of grants in the Prime Minister's office are used for education.

80. Domestic resources can also be mobilized from local communities that own community schools that supplement funding through fundraising activities. Such funding sources are organized by school management and target specific projects within the school or contribute towards recurrent costs. However, wealthier communities are more adept at supplementing government funds for education.

81. Development partners also contribute to the education budget, and the education system relies on this to fill in gaps. Without these donations, the system stands to fall short and the progress of certain activities to be derailed, especially new initiatives identified for holistically uplifting learning and teaching.

82. Despite an enhanced budget for domestic resource mobilization, education continues to require further investment. Many schools seeking to raise their standards and improve the quality of education offered are constrained by their Government-provided budget.

83. The Special Rapporteur would like to suggest a model whereby all education-related fundraising, for example through philanthropy, is placed in a national trust fund. This fund would enhance the national investment in education through domestic resource mobilization. With an equity-based approach, financial resources for education should be judiciously utilized.

84. Primary and secondary education is designed to be compulsory and free. In the past three years, the Government has allocated approximately F$ 500 million each year to education.[16] This results in schools receiving between F$ 425 and F$ 710 per child for primary and for secondary schools, depending on enrolment and student year.

85. In order to address geographic differences, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is experimenting with awarding grants based not just on student enrolment, which favours larger, urban schools, but also on all operating costs. The new formula takes into account a number of indices: the distance of the school from main towns or cities; accessibility by boat or road; the mark-up of the prices of materials and transportation costs because of distance and difficulty of access; the availability and frequency of public transport and telecommunications; the amount of economic support for small-island schools; and the availability of amenities such as water, electricity and medical facilities.

86. The Special Rapporteur understands that the present funding formula, which provides money on a per-student basis, disproportionately benefiting large urban schools at

[16] www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Speeches/2014-national-budget-announcement.aspx; see also www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/227158/free-education-for-primary-and-secondary-school-students-in-fiji.

the expense of the small rural ones, is being reviewed in order to provide more financial support in marginalized and rural areas.

87. In addition to ensuring academic merit, a scholarship system should also ensure that students from rural or economically disadvantaged environments are given better educational opportunities.

IX. Skills development: valorizing technical and vocational education and training

88. Fiji, like almost all developing countries, needs to address skills development through technical and vocational education and training.

89. In response to youth unemployment and a high demand for skilled labour, the Government of Fiji has embarked on an ambitious programme to strengthen this sector. The Government recognizes the key importance of technical and vocational education and training. From high school, students can opt for technical colleges. A range of technical courses and programmes are offered in these colleges, which provide free skills development programmes. The Government should provide the impetus for the creation of a viable, attractive technical and vocational education and training programme with competency-based incentives for students.

90. It may be recalled that, in its 2014 concluding observations to Fiji, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Fiji undertake impact assessments of educational strategies and take corrective measures to ensure that school leavers were prepared for the demands of the national job market.

91. The Qualifications Framework, established by the Fiji Higher Education Commission, sets down the qualifications for a national certificate in 25 trades and vocations,[17] along with a system whereby students can learn trades which they can practise throughout Fiji, as well as the Pacific region. Further, through close collaboration with industry, students, schools and the Government can provide targeted training to ensure that graduates are able to find employment.

92. In his visit to technical colleges, the Special Rapporteur found they were of reasonable quality, but that they needed to expand their coverage and student intake. Moreover, collaboration with industry was weak, and it was reported that companies preferred to hire employees from abroad, justifying their choice by pointing to a lack of skilled local workers.

93. Increasing the attractiveness of technical and vocational training and education within Fiji must begin in the school system. Recent reforms to introduce access to technical and vocational education and training programmes in secondary schools, and to develop skills-specific programmes in conjunction with industry, are promising. However, implementation will determine whether the youth of Fiji will be able to find employment.

[17] Agriculture; aircraft maintenance; automotive (electrical and electronics); automotive (mechanic); baking and patisserie; basic security operations; beauty therapy; body works and spray painting; cabinet making and joinery; carpentry; cookery; electronics and engineering; electrical fitter mechanic; fabrication and welding in fitting and machining; heavy commercial vehicle mechanic; heavy mobile plant mechanic; marine engineering in printing; navigation and seamanship; printing; plumbing; sheet metal; public transportation (bus driving), refrigeration; heating, ventilation and air conditioning; saw doctoring; and tourism (tour guiding).

94. The Special Rapporteur observed with concern that professional post-secondary institutions reportedly received inadequate funding to maintain their buildings and operate their classes. In the Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education, adopted in 2001, the General Conference of UNESCO noted that "Government and the private sector should recognize that technical and vocational education is an investment, not a cost, with significant returns" (see para. 9 of the Recommendation). It should be ensured that the quality of technical education is sufficiently high and respectable to allow graduates to be attractive to potential employers, without excessive additional training requirements.

95. The national shortage of skilled tradespersons leaves serious gaps, particularly in the construction and tourism industries. The Government must develop innovative approaches to ensure that national human resource policies and the education system lead to a reduction of this dependence on non-Fijians by developing a competent and skilled national workforce. The human resources development strategy needs to be harmonized with an immigration policy geared towards increasing the size of the trained workforce.

96. Care should be taken to ensure that technical and vocational education and training programmes are not constrained on account of meagre resources. These programmes deserve greater financial investment. Institutional collaboration with industry and sustained public-private partnerships are possible avenues for mobilizing more resources. Raising the esteem in which technical education is held, and making it professionally rewarding, is essential, as is developing critical thinking skills in students. This can be done by awarding national prizes to technical and vocational education and training students to raise the profile of technical education in society.

X. Reforming the legislative framework on the right to education

97. Education reform has been advancing rapidly in Fiji; however, the underlying legal framework has not kept pace. The Education Act of 1978 needs to be updated. The Act contains provisions on school fees which are not in consonance with the 2013 Constitution or the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan for the period 2015-2018 with respect to providing education free of cost.

98. It must be noted that the Education Act of 1978 has certain commendable elements, such as the concept of the "best interests" of education in relation to regulating private providers of education, and the existence of certain minimum facilities as an important condition for recognition of private schools (arts. 15, 16, 19 and 30). In revising the Act, the concepts of management of schools and liability of management, along with the regulations concerning financial accountability and the keeping of proper accounts of school income and expenditure, and the maintenance of controlling authorities (parts IV and part XII of the Act) are elements of great interest. These are very pertinent today in the context of privatization in education, so that education is preserved as a public good, safeguarded against forces of privatization and not allowed to be reduced to a business.

XI. Enforcement of the right to education

99. In order for the right to education to be safeguarded in the event of any breach or violation, the national legal system should provide mechanisms—judicial as well quasi-judicial—for its justiciability and enforcement.

A. National human rights institution

100. The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission was established according to article 45 of the Constitution. It consists of five members who are appointed by the President on the advice of the Constitutional Offices Commission. The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission can receive and investigate complaints, which it seeks to resolve through conciliation. Unresolved complaints can be referred by the Commission to a legal process. As of the date of the visit of the Rapporteur, a chair to head the Commission had not been appointed.

101. Concerns were brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur that the selection of commissioners was not fully respectful of the principle of independence of the Commission, established in the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). Moreover, as of 2014, the new Commission had not been accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.[18] The Special Rapporteur urges the Government to ensure the Commission full independence in its work, to comply with the Paris Principles and to take steps towards accrediting it. It is also important that teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders have recourse to an independent body outside of the court system to resolve disputes relating to a breach or violation, as the court system is unduly expensive in many such situations.

B. Adjudicating the right to education

102. It is well acknowledged that the right to education is a justiciable right. In his 2012 report to the Human Rights Council,[19] the Special Rapporteur reported on the several ways and the many jurisdictions in which violations of the right to education had been brought before courts, both civil and common-law. New education legislation in Fiji should specifically identify the rights of students, as well as the responsibility of teachers to ensure that equitable, high quality education is available for all. Knowledge on how the right to education has been adjudicated, particularly in other common-law jurisdictions, would be useful to courts, the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, the Government and lawyers to ensure that this right is protected in the event of its violation.

XII. Conclusions

103. **Fiji is going through a historic period of transition in the education system. As a result of important reforms ushered in by the Government, along with a national initiative to overcome the "ethnic divide" and build a better Fiji for all, the education system is undergoing transformation. Despite political instability, Fiji celebrated a democratic election in 2014, which sought to develop a common national identity and promised to usher in an era of stability and progress. The right to education has been established by the new Constitution, adopted in September 2013, and important reforms have been undertaken by the Government. The Special Rapporteur is encouraged by the commitment the Government of Fiji has shown towards implementing this right. The unprecedented increase in financial resources devoted by the Government to education must be commended, as it demonstrates a deep commitment to the future of this country.**

[18] www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/NHRI/Chart_Status_NIs.pdf.

[19] A/HRC/23/35.

104. Fiji has achieved universal access to basic education, and the Special Rapporteur was impressed by the progress he observed in implementing the right to education throughout the country. However, disparities between rural and urban students and between iTaukei and other students remain and should be addressed with targeted interventions.

105. Despite the reforms and national efforts, student educational attainment remains below expectations, and more needs to be done. Fiji must now continue to take measures to improve the quality of the education system, in keeping with the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan for the period 2015-2018. The Special Rapporteur notes with great interest that Fiji has developed a national qualifications framework to establish uniform national norms for the quality of teaching, curriculum content and pedagogy, as well as school infrastructure. These are the basic tenets, and must be constantly improved.

106. In response to youth unemployment and a high demand for skilled labour, the Government of Fiji has embarked on an ambitious programme to strengthen the technical and vocational education and training sector, with innovative institutional structures in the form of technical colleges. However, raising the esteem in which technical and vocational education and training are held, and making them professionally rewarding, are essential. At the same time, funding for this sector of strategic importance must be enhanced.

107. It is incumbent upon the Government of Fiji to raise the profile of the right to education on account of its political commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Incheon Declaration of May 2015 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (see para. 12 above).

XIII. Recommendations

108. Taking into consideration the above and his findings during the mission, the Special Rapporteur wishes to make the following recommendations with a view towards contributing to the improvement of the education system in Fiji.

Ratifying international instruments

109. The Government of Fiji should promptly sign and ratify the key international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention against Discrimination in Education. The Government should also ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed in 2010.

Overcoming disparities in education

110. Fiji must overcome disparities in education, such as disparities between rural and urban areas, promote a system of equitable access to education in favour of all those who remain marginalized, and take affirmative measures, with special consideration for the poor. More needs to be done to address public perceptions of persons with disabilities. There is an urgent need for a public information campaign to deal with social stigma and to educate teachers, parents and children to promote the right to education for children with disabilities.

111. Education policies should seek to bring about equality of opportunity, both in law and in fact. The fundamental principle of equality of opportunity provides the essential basis for the establishment of an entire range of programmes and policies,

guided by equitable approaches in favour of the marginalized, in particular children from poor families.

Modernizing education law

112. Recent reforms in education in Fiji are underpinned by a transformative policy framework and programmatic approaches, which are commendable measures. However, national legislation has not kept pace with these reforms and practices. The current Education Act dates from 1978, and its provisions no longer reflect current educational policies and practices.

113. Fiji therefore needs to modernize its education law and to create an enforceable legal framework. The new act should integrate the large number of policy texts that have come into existence.

114. A modernized education law should be comprehensive so as to strengthen the foundations of the right to education in the national legal system. It should ensure that all aspects of the right to education are clearly defined, along with the role and responsibility of parents, students, teachers and the community. It should also lay down the objectives and content of education, with a focus on its humanistic mission. The new law should cover all key dimensions of the right to education, including providing universal education without discrimination or exclusion; upholding norms and standards related to the quality of education; revamping technical and vocational education and training for skills development; fostering lifelong learning; enhancing national investment in education; regulating and controlling private providers of education; and safeguarding education as a public good. Whether there is one comprehensive education law or a set of laws addressing various key areas, this should be accompanied by the rules and regulations necessary for effective implementation.

115. While elaborating the new education act, it is important to retain the provisions of the Education Act of 1978 that are most pertinent today, notably the concept of the "best interests" of education as a guiding principle for regulating private providers of education, their recognition being contingent upon meeting certain conditions (arts. 15, 16 and 30 of the Act). In particular, in the light of the importance accorded to responsibility and accountability in the provision of education today, it is important to retain the concepts underlying the management of schools, along with those concerning the liability of management and their financial accountability, all of which are mentioned in part IV of the Act.

116. The laws and policies should put premium on ensuring that education is not reduced to a business and is safeguarded against the forces of privatization.

Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission

117. The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission should be strengthened to meet the requirements of the Paris Principles and should be duly accredited as soon as possible to provide an independent mechanism for Fiji islanders to enforce their human rights.

118. In particular, guidance should be given to the Commission, as well as the national courts, on how the right to education should be adjudicated.

Upgrading standards and the quality of education

119. As a follow-up to the Education Sector Strategic Development Plan for the period 2015-2018, the Government should develop and implement necessary norms and standards related to quality. In keeping with the National Assessment

Framework, Fiji should embrace a "comprehensive system of quality education and learning" based on a holistic concept which goes beyond the instrumental role of education in mathematical literacy and numeracy, and places a premium on the humanistic mission of education. Further consideration should be given to strengthening the Fiji National Curriculum Framework to ensure the teaching of knowledge, wisdom, skills and cultural, moral and religious values.

120. **Quality imperatives should be a determining factor in investing in education as against recurring expenditures so as to provide a necessary financial resource base for giving effect to high quality standards and curriculum development. Enhancing national investment to foster public policy concern about the quality of education deserves much more consideration.**

121. **Quality education also necessitates that teachers should be capable of developing critical thinking in children and adults, and nurturing moral values.**

122. **In order to meet quality imperatives, Fiji needs to set common standards and norms that are conducive to building professional excellence, accompanied by instruments for monitoring and assessing the quality of education.**

Fostering respect for cultural and linguistic diversity

123. **Following the elimination of single-ethnicity schools and the mandating of compulsory teaching of *Vosa Vaka-Viti* and Fiji Hindi at a conversational level in schools, measures aimed at promoting respect for cultural diversity and mutual respect for each other must be intensified, as cultural diversity is inseparable from linguistic diversity in a multicultural society.**

Strengthening the teaching profession

124. **Teachers in Fiji face many challenges. The professional standing of teachers and the esteem in which the teaching profession is held need to be improved.**

125. **Questions regarding the status of teachers must be addressed in an effort to make the teaching profession more attractive, and held in higher esteem from a career development perspective. Contractual teaching, which erodes teachers' morale, motivation and commitment, must not be embraced; rather, the education law should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of teachers, ensuring that the teaching profession becomes an attractive career. Transparency is vital to ensure that there is no perception of undue interference in the selection, placement or promotion of teachers.**

126. **Reviewing the accountability and oversight of teacher performance is a vital function of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, and greater resources should be allocated to ensure that teachers are meeting the standards set by the Ministry. The current system relies on head teachers adopting and disseminating new and revised curricula, and being responsible for overseeing local teacher performance. The Ministry should develop and implement mechanisms that identify teachers who require additional training and support, and ensure that they are able to improve their performance so that children in all schools benefit from high quality education.**

127. **A fair and effective teaching rotation policy should be strengthened to encourage teachers to teach in remote and maritime schools. In addition to financial incentives, a fair and transparent rotation policy should be included in promotion and placement considerations.**

Role of parents and community

128. **Education is the primary responsibility of the Government, but it is also a social responsibility. Parents, teachers and communities have important roles to play in school management and educational governance in local settings. The Government must make greater efforts to include parents as key stakeholders in improving education. Parents must be provided with channels to flag concerns to the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.**

Strengthening technical and vocational education and training

129. **The Government should continue to strengthen the secondary school curriculum with a view towards creating a viable, attractive technical and vocational education and training programme which will provide qualified, capable graduates for professional post-secondary institutes. This programme should also seek to increase the number of women entering technical fields and the workforce.**

130. **Closer partnerships with industry are needed to ensure that graduates have the skills needed to find work after graduating. In-school vocational training fairs, on-site school visits and similar initiatives may help students better appreciate the career possibilities associated with non-academic career options.**

131. **The perception among teachers, students and parents that technical and vocational education and training is a career path of last resort must be transformed. Technical and vocational education and training should be made more attractive and professionally esteemed as a system that produces the skilled workers that the economy of the Fiji requires. Technical institutions should not be treated as a stream apart, but rather as an integral part of educating the youth of Fiji.**

132. **Technical and vocational education and training should be valorised as a professional career path, with a campaign for raising its social perception and the esteem in which it is held. Policymakers, educators and teachers must work with students, parents and industrial partners to help spread the message that the competencies and skills that respond to the rising aspirations of youth in today's globalized economy provide leverage in economic development and social progress. Teachers must also be trained so that they can better guide students towards non-academic career options in a positive way.**

133. **Recognizing the economic importance of strengthening the technical and vocational education and training sector, the Government should continue to strengthen funding for vocational post-secondary institutions. The Government should explore a diverse range of funding mechanisms and resources for this sector. For example, as part of the corporate social responsibility tax, enterprises can be encouraged to invest in this sector in recognition of its key importance for industrial development and economic growth. Even a special fund could be envisaged in order to leverage existing resources for national technical and vocational education and training programmes, in particular for technical equipment and facilities. The Government should consider sharing to the maximum extent possible funding for technical and vocational education and training with industry and the private sector, with appropriate incentives to that end.**

134. **While the proposal for a formal memorandum of agreement between the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts and the trustees or school board of the Technical College of Fiji pursuant to policies on development and management of the College is a welcome development, it is even more important to broaden this approach, providing a memorandum of cooperation with industry and enterprises as well, in order to develop an institutionalized collaboration with them.**

Funding of education

135. **The significant recent increases in financial resources devoted by the Government to education must be commended, as this demonstrates a deep commitment to the future of this country. However, the funding should be better distributed to address the specific requirements of each school to ensure that the quality of education is equitable and that quality standards are comparable throughout the country. The current disparities in quality and infrastructure between large, urban schools and rural and maritime schools must be urgently addressed.**

136. **The Government should consider enacting legislation that establishes a funding model for education that establishes minimum funding levels and provides equitable mechanisms to address inequalities. One example could be the establishment of a national education endowment fund into which all money that is raised privately is pooled and distributed according to need to ensure that schools in wealthier areas are not unduly advantaged.**

Key role of Fuji for promoting right to education in the Pacific region

137. **Fiji is an education hub in the Pacific region, and it would be opportune if Fiji were to organize regional-level events in order to exchange experiences in key areas such as skills development and education programmes for preserving cultural heritage and Pacific ethos. In a region where countries have committed themselves to regional cooperation, Fiji can play a pioneering role in giving visibility to such concerted action.**